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Listening to Older Adults about Long Term Care on the International Day of Older Persons

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 1, 2020

Today is the United Nations' [International Day of Older Persons](#) and the launch of the World Health Organizations' [Decade of Healthy Ageing](#). Poignantly, the timing this year coincides with the release of three critical reports highlighting the heart breaking experiences of older adults living in long term care (LTC) and their family and friend caregivers, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a two-part series titled [IMPACT STATEMENT: My heart aches every day. Is anyone listening?](#) and [POSITION STATEMENT: I am not a visitor. I am his wife and life partner.](#), nine spouses of LTC residents from Southern Ontario have documented their experiences of love, loss, fear and anxiety (among other emotions) as they were separated from their spouses during the lockdown of LTC homes in the province, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In taking the unusual and important step of documenting and sharing their experiences, the spouses noted that they "do not feel as though their voices have been heard. They have tried to be patient, to keep a positive attitude, to hold it together when all they want, and are asking for is the chance to hold the hands of their loved ones". Said one spouse, of her forced separation from her husband who lives with dementia, "let me at least see him and hug him while he still knows who I am", encapsulating the importance of [family presence in LTC](#).

Also today, the Ontario LTC COVID-19 Commission released the [transcript](#) of their meeting with the Board of the [Ontario Association of Residents' Councils](#). This Board, made of residents from LTC homes, spoke in detail about their experiences over the last six months using language like “devastating, emotional, terror awakened, muzzled, trapped, broken-spirited and boredom” to describe their feelings. Said Barry Hickling, OARC Board Member and LTC resident “The fear that we experience, it is all — all of it is exploding in the last six months. It hurts. We are isolated, alone, without family or friends to visit with us. I don’t want to go through this ever in my life again. And I pray and hope that, by gosh, if there is another wave, let’s deal with it adequately, appropriately, efficiently, and directly.”

The transcript, impact statement and position statement, together, detail many suggestions relevant to LTC reform and older adult care more generally. Many of these suggestions also reflect an earlier [joint letter, prepared and submitted in September by six organizations](#) to Ontario’s Premier and the Ministers of Long Term Care and Health. Recent updates to [visitor guidelines in Ontario LTC homes reflects](#) steps in the right direction.

“As we think about the meaning of the International Day of Older Persons, a day to celebrate and reflect on issues pertinent to older adults, it is clear that we have received a clear call to action from residents of LTC homes, their spouses and others who care about them” says Kelly Kay, Executive Director of the Provincial Geriatrics Leadership Office, which provides the coordinating infrastructure for clinical geriatric services in Ontario. “The PGLO is listening” notes Kay “and we will continue to work with older adults to ensure their voices and messages are heard”.

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